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Subject: WRD 110/111/112 First-year Engagement Plan for Fall 2020

WRD 110/111/112 courses are an integral part of the first-year experience for new students at the University of Kentucky. Each fall WRD 110 and 112 function as one of the first courses that over two thousand first-year students interact with and receive individual feedback from their instructor. We know that this individual communication between instructor and student is extremely important for first-year retention. In a typical year, only a handful of our fall first-year writing courses are online. This fall, we expect those numbers to be much higher. Over the course of the summer, our teaching mentors have prepared and taught online WRD 110 courses in anticipation of the coming fall. Based on what we know about the first-semester experience, retention, and the importance of making a personal and early connection with students, I am asking all of our 63 instructors to do the following this fall to help our new first-year students:

- 1) Contact students directly via e-mail and Canvas a few days before the start of the semester and introduce themselves, the course, and any particulars related to their mode of instruction and provide multiple ways for students to contact them. If they have an office phone and don't plan to be there, setup forwarding to another number. If they prefer students contact them by email rather than via Canvas, specify that prior to the start of the semester. We know from our online summer offerings that new students may be confused about where the course lives online.
- 2) Schedule individual conferences (5-10 minutes) with students much earlier than a typical WRD 110 course. I am recommending early individual conferences the second week of the fall semester via Zoom/phone/or any other comparable technology. Establishing a personal connection and line of communication with students early will considerably enhance students' first-year experience and help with overall retention.
- 3) Use the MyUK scheduled course time for synchronous meetings with students. These could be small group peer review sessions, large group conversations, or individual conferences. I usually recommend two individual WRD 110/112

conferences in a typical semester, but this fall I am recommending three. While much of the work in a writing class may be done asynchronously, synchronous time with students is also a valuable part of their learning experience.

- 4) Tailor any WRD 110/112 inquiry-driven research projects to utilize [online digital and accessible resources](#). If students are being asked to interview someone as part of an assignment, make sure that such interviews are conducted digitally. Planning assignments around digital research materials that will be available throughout the semester will help protect the continuity of students' research processes in the event of any further schedule disruptions.
- 5) Be flexible about any attendance or late policies as much as possible to accommodate the complex and challenging situations that many of our students face during this moment. Have a contingency plan for students who are in isolation, sick, or caring for a loved one.
- 6) Provide campus resources for students regarding tutoring, counseling, advising, IT support, etc. WRD will have a central page of links and resources for instructors to provide students that will be available by new teacher orientation in August.
- 7) Centralize courses in a single digital location with one landing page. Communicate any course administration in the same medium for all students throughout the semester so students know where to find out what's happening from week to week.
- 8) Coordinate peer review with small groups early and often as a means to strengthen student writing, develop peer feedback skills, and create a sense of cohort with their peers. Get students to provide each other with constructive and structured feedback on their research and writing.
- 9) Celebrate student work. Now more than ever, we need to celebrate the excellent work that's done in our WRD 110/112 courses. Please nominate student work for our WRD awards in the spring and nominate excellent student work to appear in the next edition of the Engaged Citizen. Finally, let students know that you plan to promote their work as part of your iterative engagement with them throughout the semester.

Please reach out to Brittany Sulzener or myself throughout the first few weeks of class and let me know how we help. If a problem or question comes up and you need immediate help, my cell number is 517-420-2864.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Ridolfo". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Ridolfo